1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

with the customs of the Seri), endured for many years and ending at last in unpitied death. 173 563 727

Collectively the cases seem to define a germ, rather than a mature custom, of adoption. In the first case a benefactor (by means regarded as magical) was formally inducted into the reigning family; in the second case the conquering hero (through what were again regarded as magical means) was less formally recognized and venerated, even worshiped, as an all-powerful shaman; while in the third case a representative of the doughtiest alien tribe was enslaved, probably with motives akin to those expressed in the carrying of chargeless guns, the making of imitation machetes, and other fetishistic devices. Except in the first instance there is no indication of consistent custom; but since the entire history of the tribe clearly contradicts regulated adoption of aliens (and indeed affords no other example), it must be inferred that any such custom is intratribal rather than intertribal. 597 563

MARRIAGE

The most striking and significant social facts discovered among the Seri relate to marriage customs. 595

As noted repeatedly elsewhere, the tribal population is preponderantly feminine, so that polygyny naturally prevails; the number of wives reaches three or possibly four, averaging about two, though the younger warriors commonly have but one, and there are always a number of spouseless (widowed) dames but no single men of marriageable age. So far as could be ascertained, no special formalities attend the taking of supernumerary wives, who are usually widowed sisters of the first spouse; it seems to be practically a family affair, governed by considerations of convenience rather than established regulations—an irregularity combining with other facts to suggest that polygyny is incidental, and perhaps of comparatively recent origin. [589] [174]

The primary mating of the Seri is attended by observances so elaborate as to show that marriage is one of the profoundest sacraments of the tribe, penetrating the innermost recesses of tribal thought, and interwoven with the essential fibers of tribal existence. Few if any other peoples devote such anxious care to their mating as do the Seri;[1] and among no other known tribe or folk is the moral aspect of conjugal union so rigorously guarded by collective action and individual devotion. 581

The initial movement toward formal marriage seems to be somewhat indefinite (or perhaps, rather, spontaneous); according to Mashém it may be made either by the prospective groom or else by his father, though not directly by the maiden or her kinswomen. In any event the prerequisites for the union are provisionally determined in the suitor's family; these relate to the suitability of age, the propriety of 584 [582]

[1] Perhaps the closest parallel in this respect is that found in the elaborate marriage regulations prevailing among the Australian aborigines, as described by Spencer and Gillen, Walter E. Roth, and other modern observers.